

## Test 4

- D But how can females manage to do this while simultaneously feeding themselves and rearing their young? The reason is that hares have evolved such self-sufficient young. Unlike baby rabbits, leverets are born furry and mobile. They weigh about 100 g at birth and are immediately left to their own devices by their mothers. A few days later, the members of the litter creep away to create their own individual resting places, known as 'forms'. Incredibly, their mother visits them only once every 24 hours and, even then, she only suckles them for a maximum of five minutes each. This lack of family contact may seem harsh to us, but it is a strategy that draws less attention from predators. At the tender age of two weeks, leverets start to feed themselves, while still drinking their mother's milk. They grow swiftly and are fully weaned at four weeks, reaching adult weight at about six months.
- E Research has shown that hares' milk is extremely rich and fatty, so a little goes a long way. In order to produce such nutritious milk, females need a high-quality, high-calorie diet. Hares are selective feeders at the best of times: unlike many herbivores, they can't sit around waiting to digest low-quality food – they need high-energy herbs and other leaves in order to sprint. This causes them problems when faced with the smallest alterations in food availability and abundance. So, as well as reductions in the diversity of farmland habitat, the decline in the range of food plants is injurious to hares.
- F The rapid turnaround in the breeding cycle suggests that hares should, in principle, be able to increase their populations quickly to exploit new habitats. They certainly used to: studies show that hares evolved on the open plains and spread rapidly westward from the Black Sea after the last ice age (though they were probably introduced to Britain as a species to be hunted for the pot by the Romans). But today's hares are thwarted by the lack of rich farmland habitat. When the delicate herbs and other plants they rely on are ploughed up or poisoned by herbicides, these wonderful, agile runners disappear too, taking with them some of the wildness from our lives.